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AUTHOR	Bockman, John F., Ed.; Gougher, Ronald L., Ed.
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ABSTRACT

This newsletter contains a series of brief reports concerning methods of individualizing language learning and describes several ongoing experiments. The first article illustrates how individualized achievement charts aid in determining students' instructional needs. Group work and oral testing are discussed as a means of individualizing a course in literature. Language learning drills are examined from the point of view of their psychological impact on student attitudes, and means to alleviate negative effects are proposed. The final article considers a language program at the University of California in which the teacher is seen primarily as a resource person. (RL)

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Individualization of Foreign Language Learning in America
V. December, 1972

ED 069193

Editorial Comment

What is the life expectancy of the current interest in individualized foreign language instruction? We wonder. Movements come and go. Individualization, on the other hand, is a fifty-year-old, often reproachful, backdrop on the stage of American education. Against it, educational ideologies, methodologies, and just plain fads have successively played out their brief existences. They will no doubt continue to do so. Individualization, we would guess, is a recurring affirmation of the essential human condition, not a movement at all.

Individualization in education has been much like the Christian ideal which G. K. Chesterton observed has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult, and left untried. Now, with the excuse of uncontrollable variables pretty much set aside for the first time, is it possible that some of us will find individualized instruction too costly? Too dangerous? Or just too much trouble?

"We can't do it; it won't work; they won't let us" comes up again and again as the "pronoun defense mechanism" of some educators--like a substitution drill which, we believe, devolves to "I won't do it; I can't take the risk."

Certainly, individualized instruction is "gutsy" stuff. It demands that educators make wise and discriminating decisions about goals of individuals, materials for individual use, methodologies geared to individual learning styles, evaluative procedures for individual performance, and flexible organization of students and facilities. It requires time, imagination, stamina, patience, and a gift for influencing without dominating.

Not least of all, the individualization of instruction requires risk-taking: the teacher must be safe and competent enough within himself to allow other individuals to use their own strengths to enhance their own needs within their own value systems. As instructional help, individuals most need insight into both their actual and their potential strengths, needs, and values. They need the encouragement to realize their potential. Evidence is overwhelming that effective instruction is little more than one person helping another become preeminently what he can become. Individualized instruction, in the final analysis, is simply the arrangement and management of whatever circumstances bring that condition about for each individual learner.

In the pages of this newsletter you will find further grassroots evidence that teachers at all levels are shedding the preconceptions of ideology and mass-teaching methodology to concentrate on providing what individuals need to meet success in foreign language learning.

John F. Bockman, Learning Development Center
Tucson Public Schools
Tucson, Arizona

Ronald L. Gougher, Associate Professor of German
West Chester State College
West Chester, Pennsylvania

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WORKSHOPS IN INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION TO BE REPEATED JULY 9-20 AND AUGUST 6-17, 1973. SEE RELATED INFORMATION AND APPLICATION BLANK ON PAGE

You are urged to apply early. There were approximately 80 applicants accepted in 1972, and 200 had to be rejected. We will accept 70 in 1973.

See an order blank for reports related to the 1972 workshop on page

How I Tumbled Into Individualized Instruction-- and Tried to Resist

This short article is dedicated to all those teachers who say, "It sounds great but it would be impossible in my situation." You see this was my pat line until I fell into individualized instruction--through no fault of my own.

Frustration set in early as I viewed my schedule for the year. I was blessed with a "new idea", a French IIA class (the A indicated that these students received a D or complimentary C in French I but chose to continue--through interest or pressure). I said, "Oh, well," and gave a diagnostic test, which proved precisely what I thought it would. Each student was weak in one, two or ten different areas. Going on to new skill areas was hopeless; going back was a good idea but back to where and what? "Oh, dear...". Well back to the drawing board, as the saying goes and to the diagnostic tests. I took up a graph paper and charted each students' "learning holes" (in red ink).

NOM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
J. Brown			0						0			7 Def. Art.
H. O'Reilly				0	0	0				0		2 Pronouns
M. Frum	0	0		0			0					3 Etre

Then I zeroed in on some other problem areas, accent, pronunciation, oral reading skills, and one day I handed out "Paris Match" magazines and confered with each of the 19 students. We talked about filling in holes and how to do it. We picked out drills, and I gave them tape drills and worksheets. They promised to keep a check list and so did I. Then we went to work. I was soon hauling out all my flashcards, visuals, realia, worksheet and tests and putting them to use by individuals and small groups. I set up a "Baskin-Robbins" take-a-number-to-be-served system and I gave help, checked, tested and got a group together for this and that. In six weeks another diagnostic test, a graph chart and 80% of the holes were plugged. Then, as I began to feel much more comfortable with the idea that I could at last begin to teach--grumbling started. "Do we have to go back to the "other way"?" "Will you move the desks back into rows and take out the tables?" "Will you leave the record players and the tape recorders here so if you go too fast I can practice on them?" "Can't we use

'contracts' part of the time?" "It always takes me a month to learn basic sentences unless I sit for a half hour and listen to the tape." About that time my comment was "YIKES"! We talked and I drew up a sketchy comment sheet--all but one student indicated they wanted to continue working with contracts. One of the most poignant comments was, "It's so nice to be able to decide when I'm going to do French homework instead of being told. My math grade has gone up because on nights I have a lot of math I don't do French and on nights I have a few other assignments in other subjects I spend a lot of time on French."

At this point it suddenly dawned upon me that perhaps I had really been teaching these last few weeks--the students obviously had learned a lot of French and a great deal about how to study, budget time, and prepare for tests. Basically the same type of activities had been going on in my classroom that had been going on for years. Only, I wasn't the center of it all--which was probably better!

I begged for two weeks grace and set about analyzing AL-M Harcourt, Brace Unit 16 in terms of learning packets, sequence, balance of difficult and easy material, available aids, games, worksheets, overheads that could be used by one or two or a few. Unit 16 contract was OK, 17 was better and by 18 most of the bugs were ironed out. I had a recipe for what I had to admit was a form of individualized instruction.

It's a new role for me. I'm learning as much as my students in terms of organizing, checking, record keeping, setting up contracts. The combination of student progress (apparently better for this group) and student attitude (generally happier and more satisfied) has caused me to change my comment from, "Oh, well..." to "Hey, maybe I tumbled into something really good!"

Mary E. Flynn
Gunston Junior High School
Arlington, Virginia

Don Quijote Individualized?

"Never!" is the possible reaction of college literature instructors who are being prodded to give up their lock-step, teacher-oriented approach in favor of individualization. Aside from his awareness that students are less and less willing to tolerate the traditional roles of taking lecture notes and reciting, the instructor may be led to individualization by others' positive and rewarding experiences. To that end, I here report some impressions taken from my individualized literature classes--one of which was, in fact, Don Quijote--of the past few years.

After the usual false starts, I have come to adhere to the following credo principles: first, the selection of fewer complete works is favored over the anthology approach; second, course objectives and learning objectives should be clearly spelled out (to the students) in writing for constant reference; third, discussions work best within small groups of three to four persons when punctuated with frequent whole-class sessions on general topics; and fourth, detailed discussion questions ranging from the specific to the speculative

must be provided, either by the instructor or by the student, or preferably both.

I divided each longer work into smaller units of study; short works are considered as units in themselves. A good workable unit length approximates one week's reading of the average student, so actual page length will vary according to difficulty. The student reads the lesson and as he does so discusses it in class with a group that is proceeding at more or less his own pace. Every day he brings to class a few written questions of his own; these I supplement with other questions or handouts which also serve as trial tests. I am then free during class time to circulate from group to group, listening and when asked, helping out. Students are free, even urged, to migrate from group to group, but before long they invariably settle into one that more or less coincides in ability and interest.

After reading and discussing the unit to his satisfaction, the student takes a short ten-or-fifteen-minute oral exam. He is given two letter grades of equal weight, one on content, another on language usage and proficiency. In content I give only A, B, C and Repeat. The latter indicates that the student must restudy and reexamine on that unit. I keep a constantly revolving file of test questions on 3 x 5 cards from which I shuffle and deal, so that every exam is different though approximately equal in difficulty. Item analysis records soon eliminate poor questions, and new ones arise out of discussions. Since the student must demonstrate passable mastery of one unit before proceeding to the next, a check-sheet kept by him to gauge his progress (plus the instructor's own official record) is a necessity.

Secondary material, i.e., articles and sections of literary or cultural histories, are handled in much the same way, except that I find it desirable to allow the student or the group to choose those which they prefer. Thus I put on library reserve or in a resource center two or three histories of varying difficulty and a selection of articles, all coordinated with the primary readings on the check-sheet. I test only what has been read, but the more the better. The student also chooses to prepare either a term paper or an oral report. Regarding the latter, the course guide handout states: "I will give you wide latitude on theme, treatment, and opinion, but it must be coherent and understandable to the class. Work from an outline but don't just read. Think of it as a short lecture." Our better whole-class discussions arise from these reports. Everything is in the target language, dicho sea de paso.

Note that aside from student reports, there is nothing approximating a lecture; printing has been invented and I use it. Nor is there "recitation" in the traditional manner, though constant oral communication by all students is the course mainstay and the oral tests reflect this, seeking not only information but also increased fluency.

Questionnaire evaluations have shown that students definitely prefer individualization to either the lecture or the pseudo-Scoratic ("guess-what-I'm-leading-up-to") approach. 89% are pleased with the self-paced frequency and the nature of testing. Although 64% have confessed that these classes are more work than others, they still like them better. By pacing themselves

they clearly do more reading than I would dare assign them in a traditional class: peer competion or esprit-de-corps operates here in favor of better learning rather than contrary to it as usual. In short, students prefer it and so do I. Individualization both reflects and fosters the fact that both language and literary studies are essentially social in nature. Language study is a strongly social undertaking, so say theorists and practitioners of individualization; so too, ideally, are literary studies, and I have found the above techniques greatly encouraging.

James W. Brown
Department of Foreign Languages
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

Individualized Procedures & Techniques for Teaching a Second Language

In order to handle adequately good foreign language teaching procedures and specific techniques the teacher must become a synthesist. That is, maximum use must be made of a great variety of principles ranging from highly structured drills to the semi-free use of informal chatting. How does one become an educational synthesist? Well, it's not easy but we might begin by recognizing from the outset that it will be a more difficult task than teaching exclusively from the book. After this recognition should follow a commitment to try to become such a teacher. Something is terribly wrong if, even though we think our profession is a worthy one, we act unprofessionally by letting ourselves get into a stultifying rut. There is nothing that will produce this rut so quickly as teaching a lot of hours per week page after page, from the same book, in the same way, day after day only to complain bitterly that it is a lousy book.

In order to become a good synthesist one must above all things individualize the material in the book so that it comes off differently with each class. We must synthesize the material as it is with the student as he is along with our own desire to be effective teachers. Let me cite here only one example before continuing with the theory.

On a given page, for instance, a book might have the following substitution drill:

Mr. Garcia is the brightest manager of the Banco de comercio.

Miss Smith ------ --------- ------- -- --- ----- -- --------.

---------- ---- ------- lady ------ ------

My mother in law ----- ------- ---- ------ ------

---------- ----- ------- ---- ------ circus

bearded ----- ----- ------

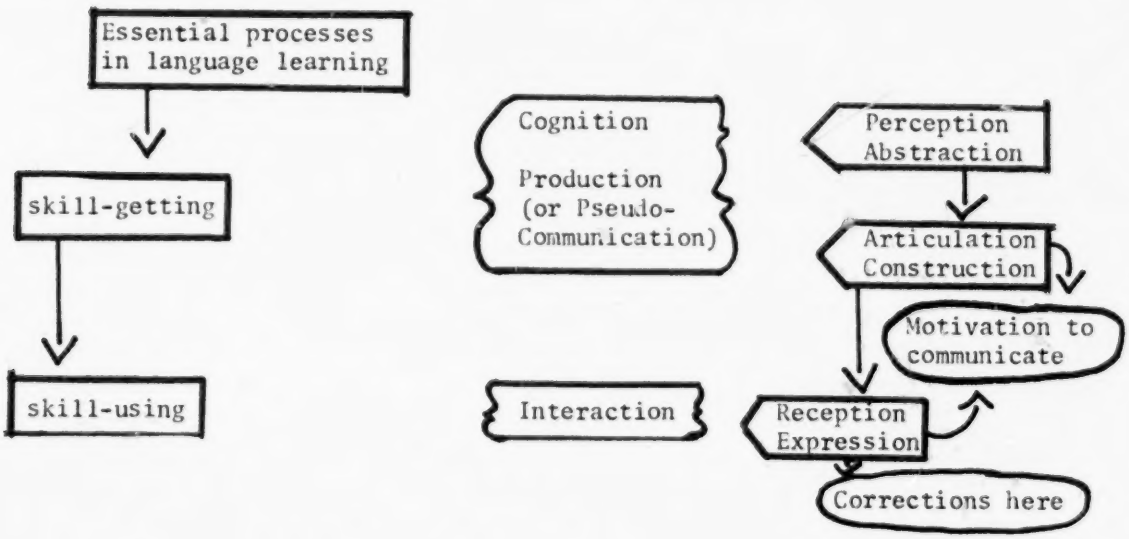
Good for a chuckle? Maybe, but only once. If we individualize the procedure, however, right after presenting the drill we can get greater and more meaningful mileage out of the same drill. This can be done by synthesizing whatever the student might want to add to the drill with what has gone before. In other words, rather than give the student a new word to fit into the pattern the teacher can now give him a grammatical slot by repeating a previous word indicating that the student should furnish a fitting alternative word of his own. In doing this the student is often delighted that at last he can try some words he has been hoping to use but is too inhibited by the set structures and vocabulary of text.

This example of individualization is not an isolated one as we will see after concerning ourselves for a moment with the underlying theory for these processes (see flow chart).

Some Essential Process
in Language Learning

This schematicized theory simply helps us to see that all of the material in or out of the book needs to be synthesized into a teaching procedure before it can become language in its natural usage. Many teachers are prone to stress abstract cognitive perceptions while others are satisfied with pseudo-communication. Not until interaction leads to motivation through reception and expression have we approached the full reach of the present theory.

The lowest oval on the right side of the diagram indicated the level at which corrections are made. Notice that this activity is directly linked to skill-using, interaction and expression. That is, correction can best be made in areas of production where students are manipulating the language in at least a semi-free manner.



Natural Uses of Language in Interaction (2)

(1) Establishing and maintaining social relations:
(2) Seeking information:
(3) Giving information:
(4) Learning to do or make something:
(5) Expressing one's reactions:
(6) Hiding one's intentions:
(7) Talking one's way out of trouble:
(8) Problem solving:
(9) Sharing leisure activities:
(10) Conversing over the telephone:
(11) Entertaining:
(12) Displaying one's achievements:
(13) Describing things visualized:
(14) Writing letters:
(15) Teaching others:

More on personalization

When drills are presented which terminate only as drills the teacher is in default. If the book is written with such items only as drills the same teacher default prevails because the book cannot individualize. The book can only give categorical structures and at best make some suggestions as to the teacher's role. Only we the teachers can individualize since we and not the book become part of the natural language interaction.

When a structure has been drilled the results of that structure should be incorporated immediately into a "dialogo fugaz". These little fletting dialogues then should become a brief exchange between student and teacher or student and student before proceeding to the next drill.

For example, if a pattern drill ends in a command such as - "Let's go to the movies tonight", before going on to the next pattern drill.

The teacher could easily challenge one student with - "Shall we go to the basketball game or to the movies tonight" in order to elicit a short drill inspired dialogue-like interaction. It is also useful at that point to have all the students engage in the same exchange with one partner. This can be done all at once without detriment and without risking disorder if the students recognize that such an exchange follows every drill. To a teacher it seems like a common-place to suggest that all drills are eventually intended for natural interaction but for the student this must be demonstrated, and practiced so that he might internalize the habit by himself.

Now imagine a 15 minute tape recording with questions for specific students. The student's names, however, are not heard until everyone has had a chance to formulate their individual answers to each question. After a pause when the individual's name is heard he then answers aloud and is given time to write out his answer as the tape moves along to another personalized question. This technique frees the teacher to move about the room correcting pronunciation, writing, and grammar on a personal level. It also leads directly into very effective dictation, comprehension and test-

ing devices. We have discussed several techniques and a theory. Within the larger framework of the above then, let us consider these thumbnail descriptions of even more specific procedures.

a) What's this? Using photographs, advertising illustrations or other visual stimuli with the class in small groups. The visuals are passed around and exchanged from group to group. The students take turns giving verbal descriptions of their visuals in the small groups.

The teacher moves about and can ask for a written description from those students who can handle the oral production but most need writing practice.

b) Role playing: In this activity care must be taken that a serious intention of using the target language is demonstrated by the students involved. More than a dialogue, this activity puts the student into a semi-free interaction controlled only by theme. One student might be asked for instance, to be a radio announcer interviewing a famous basketball team composed of the rest of his group.

c) Teaching others. This can become, when properly handled, one of the most fruitfull activities used in informal instruction of any kind. One of the better students of the group is asked to teach a specific drill, dialogue, etc. to his own group. He then asks his own star pupil to repeat the lesson.

d) Telephone talk. With informal education much of the learning, by definition, takes place outside the classroom. This activity is no more complicated to use than giving pairs of students strict assignments to use the telephone for conversing with each other or preferably with a speaker of the target language.

e) Explain your thing. Everyone does something (at least one thing) that he is proud enough of to talk about. This can be in the form of entertaining, displaying one's achievements, giving information, or simply sharing leisure activities by telling about individual hobbies.

f) Hiding one's intentions. This can easily be done in the form of a game. One student in a small group, for instance, can choose to be a famous person. Somewhat as in the game "Twenty questions: the rest of his group can quiz him with questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" until they discover his identity. Many variations of this can of course be imagined by anyone but care must be taken that the target language is strictly used and that there is sufficient teacher correction taking place to keep it from degenerating into a meaningless parlor game.

g) Expressing one's reactions. In today's world of constant turmoil and daily crisis there is always a need to express our inner feelings about emotional expression that individualization of interaction is all about. The activity can best be achieved if the teacher is not squeamish about discussing such topics as war, politics, religion, sex, etc.

This last section has been a slight amplification of some of the natural uses in interaction. Since with this system the teacher is asked to synthesize

all his techniques with his own personality I think it suffice to say -- "take it from here". The teacher should view these suggestions as ways in which he might synthesize materials on his own. After all, isn't that what we're asking the student to do?

Notes
(1) & (2) Some of the ideas on this chart and list were adapted and expanded from a talk given at the TESOL meeting in Chicago 1971 by Wilga Rivers, "Talking off the tops of their Head."

Richard Barrutia
University of California
Irvine, California

Individualized Learning of English - The Mexico City Experiment

For a number of years we at the Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales, A. C. (the Binational Center in Mexico City) have been less than completely happy with our version of audio-lingual language instruction. We were not ready to question the effectiveness of choral repetitions, substitution drills, dialogs, etc. as teaching devices, but became more and more concerned over certain disadvantages of these techniques. First, they tend to add up to a mechanical and artificial manipulation of the language, rather than creative use. Even worse, they contitute one of civilization's most effective systems for the breeding of boredom and the inviting of ennui, both on the part of the teacher and the students!

The May 3, 1971 issue of Newsweek carried a major article entitled "Does School + Joy = Learning?" No catalogue of pedagogic aids lists a supply of "joy" for the classroom. We were pondering this excellent article when a catalyst walked in the door. He was Dr. Richard Barrutia of the University of California at Irvine, presently in Mexico City as Director of the University of California's "Education Abroad Program, Mexico Center." We surprised him by our instant and enthusiastic acceptance of his offer to help us individualize our program.

We first ordered copies of certain basic reference texts.[1] Some were mentioned in the Newsweek article, others were recommended by Dr. Barrutia. We then organized an orientation session for our staff of sixty language teachers. The next step was to begin an initial experiment in our English classes.

In the term then about to begin, we had registered nineteen sections of our Course Nine, employing book nine of the American English Course.[2] Three senior teachers volunteered to conduct their three of these nineteen sections in an individualized fashion. And the results were so spectacular that we resolved to expand the experiment as rapidly as possible.

It is possible that we taught no more English in the experiment. Perhaps we only developed an environment in which the student was more at ease in using his English before strangers.

During the remaining two terms of 1971 the experiment was expanded to include a third of our total registration of 7,500 students. Present plans include the next higher level during each of the year's five academic terms.

What, exactly, is the new system? We try a new technique almost every day and discard the unproductive ones. The student is given a learning opportunity when he is ready for it. He is to learn from other students and teach himself. The teacher becomes a resource person. Each student is encouraged to advance as rapidly as his inclinations and abilities allow.

The traditional activities are limited to the presentation of new material and occasional drilling. The remainder of the time available is devoted to individual and small-group activities.

Rows of student desks or seats, directing attention to the teacher disappeared. Students are asked to rearrange the seats to form small groups. One or two minutes with a given group will often satisfy the teacher that the learning process is at work. Students act as leaders in eliciting responses from the remaining members. The teacher passes from one to the next group, helping as facilitator.

With regard to the type of activity suitable for the small groups, perhaps an example or two will do. One day the teacher asks all students to bring to class the following day an interesting photograph cut from a magazine or newspaper. The next day, when groups are formed, each group is asked to select the most interesting photo brought by members of that group. They discuss it in the group, then form a brief composition based on the picture. Each group writes out its composition, and the most interesting one (or the best composed) is posted on the wall of the room with the picture that illustrates it. The story to accompany the photograph may be delivered orally. All discussion of the photograph, as well as the story that accompanies it, is in English. Other activities are now being used. (See article by Barrutia in this newsletter).

Teacher aides are of great value. We attempted to recruit qualified individuals. The most effective aide available may be one of the students in the class, or a drop-in visitor, or a friend of the teacher who is waiting to go to lunch with him after the class. We still recruit non-salaried teacher aides.

At the Institute in Mexico City we had a double advantage. Dr. Barrutia was able to offer the services of nineteen young American graduate students from the University of California who were registered in his class in educational methodology. Secondly, for years we have offered a series of three-thirty-five hour pedagogic courses for Mexican teachers of English. We now ask each of the 150 students registered in these courses to devote a total of five hours during the seven-week period to "practice teaching". In addition,

we have now added a fourth course to the series, consisting of nothing but supervised practice teaching. These students act as teacher aides during the entire thirty-five hours of the seven week course, meeting with a supervisor once a week to discuss their experiences.

One must be careful to insure that the informal classroom situation does not invite the teacher to drop out, even for a moment. When small groups are formed, and the activities in each appear to be progressing satisfactorily, there is a great temptation for the teacher to lean against the wall and relax, or to step outside for a cigarette or a bit of gossip with the teacher of the class next door. This must be discouraged. The system will not work without constant supervision.

After that somewhat negative comment on teacher behavior, it is time for a positive one. "Individualized English Teaching" as described above demands a great deal more of the teacher than does the traditional audio-lingual approach. He must master new techniques, invent new activities, and supervise constantly and effectively. He receives no extra pay for the extra effort--his only reward is a chance to try something new (escape from boredom), and an increased measure of the satisfaction with the learning process that has always been the principal reward for the teacher. To date, all teachers taking part have been volunteers.

It should be mentioned that it is not necessary to change textbooks, in order to incorporate these new ideas in English instruction. As outlined above, the text is used only in the first few minutes of each class, to present the new material for the day. Suggestions and guidance for the remainder of each class period may be given the teacher in the form of mimeographed sheets outlining, for the most part, techniques that seem to work, and warning against techniques that have proved unproductive. Where do these suggestions come from? From the teachers themselves!

[1]The reference and background texts that have proved most useful to us are:

Goodman, Paul. Compulsory Mis-Education and the Community of Scholars. Vintage: New York, 1964.
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Herndon, James. How to Survive in Your Native Land. Simon and Schuster: New York, 1971, and The Way It Spozed to Be. Bantam: New York, 1969.
Kozol, Jonathan. Death at an Early Age. Bantam: New York, 1967.
Postman, Neil and Weingartner, Charles. Teaching as a Subversive Activity: Dell Publishing.
Silberman, Charles E. Crisis in the Classroom Random House: New York, 1970.

[2]American English Course in nine volumes with two guides, distributed by the Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales, A.C., Hamburgo 115, Mexico 6, D. F., Mexico.

Robert B. Young
Binational Center
Mexico City, Mexico